

The Improving Collaboration Between Conservation and Archeology

Collaboration between conservators and archeologists has been discussed and analyzed numerous times in print over many years.¹ Gradually, some conservators and archeologists are developing effective collaborative projects that improve the preservation of objects and architecture while adding information for the interpretation of the site. This issue of *CRM* focuses on the contributions of conservators to archeology during fieldwork, analysis, and long-term preservation of curated collections. Articles by a number of conservators, working throughout the world, have been collected. Their descriptions illustrate the wide range of projects conservators are involved with, including:

- treating objects in the field
- insuring their preservation and availability in repositories
- collaborating on research
- preserving architecture and objects as part of larger preservation/tourist development projects²
- working with federal and state agencies and Native peoples on a collaborative approach to preservation.

In the United States, conservation has long been a part of underwater and historical archeology. The article by Claire Peachey about on-going work on the *Housatonic* and *Hunley* shipwrecks is one example. Colonial Williamsburg has had a laboratory for archeological conservation since the early 1930s, and the current conservator, Emily Williams, discusses how the information gained from treatment has recently added to the knowledge and interpretation of one site. Howard Wellman shows how the particular skills of conservators can generate information that improves interpretation.

American conservators and archeologists have begun to collaborate more on long-term preservation of Native American materials in repositories such as the human remains rehousing project described by Vicki Cassman, et. al. Native

American communities are also being included in the decision-making process, such as the rock art preservation program at Petroglyph National Monument described by Claire Dean.

However, field experience for student conservators is still limited on U.S. excavations and most go abroad to work on site in places such as the Mediterranean or Middle East where archeological conservation has a long history. Kent Severson's paper describes the object and architectural conservation projects that give training opportunities to both American and Turkish students at the site of Aphrodisias. More field opportunities in the U.S. are needed. Only then can students learn about the particular problems of archeological conservation in the U.S.³

Other authors in this issue discuss how conservation can be better integrated into archeological fieldwork. Lisa Young describes how careful planning and the use of supervised students

Fieldwork requires imaginative adaptation of typical conservation techniques.



Cleaning and stabilization of objects in the field allow for faster and better interpretation and improved long-term preservation.



allowed for conservation of objects recovered from a historic site in Philadelphia. Catherine Magee describes the different roles she has filled on excavations depending on need. Rae Beaubien uses her considerable experience in Mesoamerica to describe how conservation can be better integrated into field archeology anywhere.

Finally, three short pieces describe how the profile of archaeological conservation is being raised through the support of archeological organizations. Jeff Maish describes a traveling poster that was co-sponsored by the Society for Historical Archaeology (SHA) and the American Institute for Conservation (AIC). Catherine Sease gives information on the Archaeological Institute of America's (AIA) Conservation and Heritage Management Award. A website produced by Terry Childs of the National Park Service Archeology and Ethnography Program incorporates conservation into training to care for archeological collections.

Bit by bit, archeologists and conservators are finding ways to collaborate to improve interpretation and to better preserve the archeological

objects and structures for re-analysis and other uses. Archeological professional organizations such as SHA and AIA are supporting this collaboration. As more conservation students are trained in the specifics of field conservation, and more archeologists become acquainted with how the inclusion of a conservator can help with their concerns in the short and long term, this collaboration will only expand. Though theoretical perspectives have radically changed since 1904, W.M. Flinders Petrie's admonition still holds:

The preservation of the objects that are found is a necessary duty of the finder. To disclose things only to destroy them, when a more skillful or patient worker might have added them to the world's treasures is a hideous fault.⁴

More collaboration will help ensure the preservation of our archeological resources for continued use in research and interpretation.

Notes

- ¹ See for example, B. J. Borque, "Conservation in Archaeology: Working toward Closer Cooperation," *American Antiquity* 45:4 (1980): 794-99; K. Morris, "Conservation of Archaeological Collections," *North American Archaeologist* 2:2 (1980): 131-36; J. Johnson, "Conservation and Archaeology in Great Britain and the United States: A Comparison," *Journal of the American Institute for Conservation* 32:3 (1993): 249-69.
- ² See also, "A Unity of Theory and Practice Bridging to the Past: The University of Pennsylvania and the NPS," *CRM* 20:10 (1997). This issue describes a number of architectural conservation projects on archeological sites.
- ³ There is a new training program in Ethnographic and Archaeological Conservation in development at the Cotsen Institute of Archaeology at UCLA in collaboration with the J. Paul Getty Trust. For information see <<http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/iaa/academic/conservation.html>>.
- ⁴ W.M.F. Petrie, *Methods and Aims in Archaeology* (London: Macmillan, 1904).

Jessica S. Johnson is the Senior Objects Conservator, National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC, and from 1991 to 2001 was Head of Objects Conservation at the Gordion Project in Turkey, sponsored by the University of Pennsylvania, University Museum. She is guest editor of this issue of CRM.

Photos courtesy the author.